#10

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COMICS INTERVIEW PUBLICATION

X-THIEVES™

WANTED

Dear Scott,

We have a postal strike due to start here in a day or so, so who knows when (if?) this will reach you . . . (Feel free to make any nasty comments you want about rotten government postal service. Most Canadians would agree with you wholeheartedly on that subject!)

Thanks for your interesting letter. I enjoyed reading it. However, it will perhaps come as no surprise to you that I do not agree with the basis and implications of your argument. I shall try to summarize my principal objections in the following paragraphs.

You use the term "government extortion." Of course, this is a loaded term. As the saying goes: I am determined, you are stubborn, he is pig-headed. It all depends on how you look at it. Firstly, the word "extortion" usually involves a connotation of illegality. Naturally, in the proper exercise of government authority, illegality is not a factor. (Which is, of course, not to say that governments never act illegally! Being human institutions, they are susceptible to errors. However, such instances are an argument for correcting the operation of the system, not of the invalidity of the system itself.) Another facet of "extortion" is the use of "undue" force. What is "due" and "undue" depends on the analysis of the situation. For instance, it is undue force for me to punch someone in the mouth because they insulted my favorite hockey team. It is not undue force for me to punch someone in the mouth because they are trying to kill me. So, your use of the term "extortion" is unduly (in *my* opinion!) inflammatory, imprecise, and more indicative of your feeling than of any objective reality — and thus ultimately unpersuasive.

Of course, you attempt to justify your use of the term "extortion" in your example about people ganging up on an individual. I agree entirely with you in your example up to the point where you say "if Jones gathered together a gang of 10 people, and similarly robbed Smith, the act would be just as immoral as if Smith were acting alone." Quite correct. However, you then make an unjustified leap in logic. You equate extortion with government action. As I said above, such an assumption is unwarranted or, at the very least in your case, not demonstrated. To put it simply, "majority rule" is *not* extortion. I shall proceed to attempt to demonstrate this assertion.

First, any proper construction of "majority rule" entails the concept of "minority rights". Majority rule does *not* mean that the majority can and will run roughshod over the minority. (Again, this is not to say that doesn't happen!) We must not confuse the "final arbitration" power of majority decisions with the conciliation process inherent in democracy. Democracy is not just a quick vote to determine which side rules. It also involves discussion and negotiation to arrive at solution by consensus. Indeed, certain democratic principles *enshrine* the rights of minorities (or potential minorities) — such as the right to freedom of expression, which is not contingent upon being in the majority. Majority-rule/democracy is far far from being "mob rule", as you seem to think!

Second, I am reminded of **Winston Churchill's** words (and I paraphrase): "Democracy is the worst system of government in the history of mankind — except for all the others." In other words, in the current context, if you would not have democracy or majority rule, what *would* you have?! I assume that you believe in *some* form of government! Given that humankind *must* operate in groups (to a greater or lesser degree), *some* form of government is both necessary and inevitable. What would you put in place of the principle of majority rule? Also, how would you avoid "extortion" of the individual by the majority? For instance, what if someone refused to drive on the right side of the road or stop at red lights? Surely, he must be compelled to do so, in the name of public safety? Is this not coercion — or, in your terms, "extortion"? (I would answer that it is indeed coercion, but that it is justifiable coercion. Consensus must be sought but in the end, certain situations must be resolved by the coercive power of the state, otherwise chaos will be the result.)

Third, you seem to be saying that you must never be forced to do something — that you have the right to be uninvolved. However, sometimes action is necessary, both in a legal and moral sense. For instance, if you see a man drowning and there is a lifeline laying at your feet, is it not a moral crime to do nothing? Similarly, certain positive actions are legally and morally required in any society.

Fourth, there is the principle of compromise. To some, "compromise" is a dirty word. (However, let me make it clear that I use the word here in the sense of adjusting ones actions but *not* in acting immorally.) Compromise is necessary if civilization is to exist. If I want to listen to my radio, is that not my right? What if I insist on playing it at full blast on my balcony at 2:00 am on Tuesday morning? Am I still within my rights? Do I not have to compromise my taste in radio listening in recognition of the rights of my neighbors to get a proper night's sleep? I think so. This is true even if I am a shift-worker and am not able to play my radio loudly in the daytime since I'm at work then. The nighttime rights of my neighbours and the habits of the majority and the conventions of society still prevail in a moral sense. Similarly, we must perhaps compromise certain of our standards in order to obey the customs and laws of society. (Which is not, of course, to say that all laws are moral. The question of civil disobedience is tricky and shadowy but suffice it to say that while I believe that some laws must be opposed and even disobeyed on moral grounds, this is a drastic step and not one to be taken lightly.)

You say that the X-Thieves are better than the IRS because the X-Thieves rob me only once. Perhaps. But there are plenty of other thieves in the world! Thus, I fail to see how this fact would be of any solace to me.

I definitely disagree that I am saying that "good ends justify evil means!" As indicated above, I do not agree that proper government authority is "evil," thus your point has no force with relation to my argument.

You state that "charitable activities such as aid to needy children, homeless adults, and 'cultural arts' can and should be funded through voluntary contributions." The fact is that they are not. I read recently that last year in the US it is estimated that over one million adults did not have necessary surgery or other medical care because they lacked the money to pay for it. Where is private charity to help them? Where *is* the private charity to house homeless adults or to help needy children? Wherever it is, it is certainly not sufficient.

No one will argue that government bureaucracies can be inefficient! (However, private funds are not always too efficient, either. I read in HARPER'S that far less than 10% of the money collected by the Shriners goes to charity.) Also, part of the inefficiency of government bureaucracies is simply that they *are* so large. But *any* bureaucracy created to do a large task such as comprehensive social work must be large.

Also, private charities just do not address the same range and type of issues that government confronts. Part of this is due to a lack of authority. For instance, private charities could not set or enforce standards and practices, such as safety rules. Part of this is due to lack of desire or capability. There were plenty of charities in Victorian England, yet children still died in the mines.

However, I should emphasize that I do not disagree with the idea that private institutions can be more efficient. For instance, the phone companies in Ontario and Quebec are privately owned and they do just as good a job (though not an appreciably better one) than the government-owned phone utilities in the other provinces. Of course, the private phone companies are closely regulated by government, and this is probably necessary.

Basically, I favour a mix of government and private enterprise. The communist countries have (far) too much government control, while the US has (somewhat) too much "free enterprise" — at least, that's what I think. It is a tradition of American society to distrust government. Americans believe that they must be protected *from* their government. However, for various historical and social reasons that I will not go into here (if I am indeed competent to do so!), this is not a view held by most other people in the free world. They view their governments as protecting *them* — from adverse conditions, etc. Of course, this rests on having a truly democratic system that is responsive to the people's needs. (And, I might say, that we often get what we expect. If we treat government as being only our enemy then it will turn out to be so in the end.)

(CONTINUED ON INSIDE BACK COVER)

Pansafredicopocog — or **FRED** for short (which he is). He'll "acquire" anything from anywhen for you—IF the price is right.

BIANCA — Fred's partner. She's never met a lock she couldn't pick.

Transformers? Go-Bots? Bah! The **FREDMOBILE** beats them all! It's a sleek, FTL car that can turn into ANYTHING (not to mention, travel through space and time)!

ARISTOCRATIC XTRATERRESTRIAL TIME-TRAVELING THIEVES

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THE FIRST THING YOU NOTICE IS THE STENCH -- THOUGH STENCH IS HARDLY ADEQUATE TO DESCRIBE THIS ODOR! IT IS BEYOND NAUSEOUS, BEYOND PUTRID!
IT IS SO OVERWHELMING THAT YOU DON'T NOTICE THE CORPSES LYING EVERYWHERE --
SNORT
GRRR
-- OR THE REVOLTING SOUNDS MADE BY POX THE MUTANT -- WHO IS ALSO THE SOURCE OF THE SMELL!
YOU DON'T EVEN NOTICE THAT FRED AND BIANCA -- THE X-THIEVES -- AREN'T ON THE SPLASH PAGE OF THEIR OWN BOOK!
AND NOW...
POX THE MUTANT

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SUDDENLY, THE SOUNDS STOP AND POX **PROWLS** THE AISLES AGAIN!

BELCH

OKAY, SO MAYBE THE SOUNDS DON'T **ENTIRELY** STOP...

NEED MORE **FOOD!** SOME *CHITLINS*-- YEAH, THAT'D BE GOOD! AND *KETCHUP!* CHIT-LINS AND KETCHUP-- MMM MMM **GOOD!**

WITHOUT WARNING, A VAGUE, UNSETTLING **SENSATION** BEGINS IN POX'S **STOMACH**...

UH-OH! I THINK I GOT **GAS** REAL BAD!

NO POX, NOT **GAS**-- A **TELEPORTATION BEAM!**

OH, THANKS...

ANYTIME.

MILLIONS OF MILES AWAY...

WHERE THE **HELL** AM I? WHAT'S GOING ON?

RELAX, POX-- YOU HAVE **NOTHING** TO WORRY ABOUT.

OOOO-- A **DISEMBODIED VOICE!** HOW MYSTERIOUS!

I GOT GOOD **SCRIPT WRITERS.**

DISEMBODIED? I DIDN'T REALIZE YOU KNEW SUCH **BIG WORDS,** POX!

I SEE... WELL, I HAVE A **JOB** FOR YOU.

WHO YOU WANT **KILLED?**

HOW DO YOU KNOW I WANT SOMEONE **KILLED?**

POX THE MUTANT ONLY DOES **ONE** THING-- HE KILLS! KILLS AND EATS! **TWO**--**TWO** THINGS! HE KILLS, EATS, AND--

YES, NEVER MIND, POX-- YOU WERE RIGHT THE FIRST TIME! I WANT YOU TO KILL SOMEONE--TWO SOMEONES!
I WANT YOU TO KILL FRED AND BIANCA--THE X-THIEVES!
ANY QUESTIONS, POX?
YEAH-- WHERE DO I FIND THEM?
THAT IS THE LEAST OF YOUR PROBLEMS! I AM TELEPORTING YOU TO THEIR HOME SYSTEM RIGHT NOW.
≥PHEW≤ I'LL NEED TO FUMIGATE THIS PLACE TO RID OF THAT SMELL!
AND WHILE I'M AT IT, I REALLY OUGHT TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THESE BURNED OUT LIGHTS, TOO!
FAR FROM THE POORLY LIT ROOM, FAR ACROSS THE VAST VOID OF SPACE--

--THE AFOREMENTIONED X-THIEVES FIND THEMSELVES IN A HEAP OF TROUBLE!
YOW! THAT WAS TOO CLOSE!
WHY DIDN'T WE TRY TO BREAK IN THROUGH A SAFER ENTRANCE?
BECAUSE YOU SAID THIS WAS THE SAFEST WAY IN!
ZAP
ZAP
ZOOM
EXTERMINATE!
AND YOU ACTUALLY LISTENED TO ME?
DON'T WORRY-- IT WON'T HAPPEN AGAIN!
THAT WAS A FIGURE OF SPEECH, BIANCA-- YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO TAKE IT LITERALLY!
BONK
ZOOM
EXTERMINATE!
WHAT DID YOU SAY? I WAS BUSY NOT LISTENING!
THEN DON'T LISTEN TO THIS-- ONE MORE STEP AND YOU'RE DEAD MEAT!
EXTERMINATE!
ZAP
OKAY--SO MAYBE I'LL LISTEN TO YOU AT LEAST SOME OF THE TIME!

SOME OF THE TIME? MY DEAR, WE ARE PARTNERS IN CRIME!
EXTER-- THIS DOES NOT LOOK GOOD!
OH, THE IGNOMINY OF IT-- OUT MANEUVERED BY AN ORGANIC!
KICK!
IT IS VITALLY IMPORTANT THAT WE KEEP THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION OPEN BETWEEN THE TWO OF US!
HM... POINT MADE, FRED. I PROMISE I'LL ALWAYS LISTEN TO WHAT YOU SAY!
BEEP BEEP BEEP
I WOULD TRULY APPRECIATE IT IF YOU READERS WOULD SKIP THE NEXT PANEL!
SMART
NO GUARANTEES THAT I'LL PAY ANY ATTENTION TO IT, THOUGH!

SECONDS LATER...

OKAY, IF *MEMORY* SERVES ME, WE SHOULD BE FAIRLY *SAFE* FOR THE NEXT FEW MINUTES.

HUH! THAT PROBABLY MEANS ALL *HELL* IS ABOUT TO BREAK LOOSE!

AND AT THAT *EXACT* SECOND--

--AS IF IN *RESPONSE* TO BIANCA--

--ALL UP AND DOWN THE *HALLWAY*--

--ALL HELL *DOES* BREAK LOOSE!

OF COURSE, THIS *SECURITY SYSTEM* DIDN'T HAVE TO TAKE ME SO LITERALLY!

WHAT? YOU CONSIDER THIS MEASLY LITTLE *LASER MACE* TO BE DANGEROUS?

A THIEF--PARTICULARLY AN *X-THIEF*--SHOULD *ALWAYS* BE PREPARED TO HANDLE TRIFLING MATTERS SUCH AS THIS!

VOILA!

ZING

SPRAK

BOOM
WHY FRED, YOU'VE COINED A NEW DEFINITION FOR VOILA!
VOILA-- WATCH OUT, DEATH IS IMMINENT!
EVERYONE'S A CRITIC...
AND SO IT GOES!
THE DEXTEROUS DUO LEAPS FROM ONE TRAP--
--INTO ANOTHER--
--WHICH LEADS TO A FURTHER TRAP!
ZAP
ZAP
UNTIL, FINALLY...
PHEW! MADE IT-- JUST AS I SAID WE WOULD!
YEP, BE IT EVER SO HUMBLE, THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME!
BUT DO ME A FAVOR-- NEXT TIME DON'T FORGET YOUR KEYS!

"IF THE *REVIEW BOARD* WILL DIRECT THEIR ATTENTION TO THE SCREEN, YOU WILL SEE THE *DAMAGE* DONE BY HIM WHILE STOPPING A CONVENIENCE STORE ROBBERY."

THIS IS *HORRIBLE!* HE SHOULD BE DRUMMED OUT OF THE *FORCE!*

"THESE INNOCENT BYSTANDERS HE *KILLED* DURING A HIGH-SPEED CHASE. THE OFFENDER HE WAS PURSUING--A *SPEEDER* --WAS OBLITERATED."

FIRING ISN'T STRONG ENOUGH *PUNISHMENT!* HE SHOULD HAVE HIS PERSONALITY--WHAT THERE IS OF IT-- *WIPED!*

"THIS IS THE POLITICIAN'S RESORT PLANET. HE ACCIDENTALLY DESTROYED IT DURING A *ROUTINE PATROL*. MILLIONS OF *POLITICIANS* WERE ON THE PLANET AT THE TIME."

HM... PERHAPS A SIMPLE *DEMOTION* WILL SUFFICE!

"AND THIS IS THE *PERPETRATOR* OF THESE ATROCITIES--OFFICER *QUINZAL PINBACK*. IT IS UP TO YOU MEMBERS OF THE BOARD TO DETERMINE HOW *INTERPOL* SHALL DEAL WITH HIM."

HEH, HEH-- I'VE GOT THE *PERFECT* IDEA!

THUS, THE NEXT DAY...

ZPANTE ZPANTE

DERE'S NO WAY YER GONNA GET *AWAY!*

COWARDLY CRIMINAL *SCUM!* DA *STRONG ARM* OF DA LAW--DAT'S ME -- REACHES EVERYWHERE! EVEN DOWN DIS *ALLEY!*

OH *NO* ZPANTE HE'S CATCHING ZPANTE UP!

HA! CORNERED LIKE DA *RAT* YOU IS! YOU GOT *TWO CHOICES* -- COME QUIETLY OR DIE!

I--I'LL COME QUIETLY! DON'T SHOOT ME MR. TRUANT OFFICER! I WANT TO GO TO SCHOOL TODAY! REALLY!
BUT C-CAN I GO HOME AND CHANGE PANTS, FIRST?
AND IN OTHER NEWS, WATER SUPPLIES ARE LOW FOLLOWING AN UNPRECEDENTED SURGE IN WASHING MACHINE USE TODAY. OFFICIALS ARE AT A LOSS TO EXPLAIN THIS.
THAT EVENING...
ON THE INTERSTELLAR FRONT--
THAT'S ENOUGH NEWS, RADIO--TURN YOURSELF OFF.
AW, DO I HAVE TO?
YES, QUINNY JUST GOT HOME AND NEWS UPSETS HIM SO. NOW TURN OFF!
CLICK!
HELLO, QUINNY DEAR! YOU LOOK LIKE YOU HAD A TOUGH DAY AT WORK!
TOUGH? DAT AIN'T DA HALF OF IT! DEY FIRED ME! AN' I DIDN'T SHOOT HARDLY NOBODY--JUST WINGED SOME KIDS! DAT JUST AIN'T--
HOLD IT RIGHT THERE, YOUNG MAN! HOW MANY TIMES HAVE I TOLD YOU NOT TO USE THAT COP DIALECT AROUND ME?
AW, MA--IT DON'T HURT NOTHIN'!
I'LL HURT YOUR BACKSIDE IF YOU'RE NOT CAREFUL! YOU'RE NOT TOO BIG TO BE TURNED OVER MY KNEE, QUINZAL PINBACK!
YES, MOTHER--YOU'VE INFORMED OF THAT FACT MANY TIMES BEFORE.
MUCH BETTER!

FAR FROM QUINNY AND HIS MOM, ANOTHER DOMESTIC SCENE IS BEGINNING...
FRED! WHERE ARE YOU?
I'M HUNGRY AND IT'S YOUR TURN TO COOK!
THIS HOUSE IS TOO BIG FOR HIDE-AND-SEEK! COME ON-- SHOW YOURSELF!
MINUTES LATER, BIANCA'S SEARCH BRINGS HER TO THE BEDROOM...
IF YOU'RE IN THE BATHROOM, FRED, SPEAK NOW OR FOREVER HOLD YOUR PIECE! READY OR NOT, HERE I--
HEY, FURRY BABE! SEE IF YOU CAN GIVE THE LEGGY BROAD THE SLIP AND MEET ME BACK HERE!>
DREAD SETTLES HEAVILY ON TOP OF BIANCA'S HEART. SLOWLY SHE FOLDS UNDER ITS WEIGHT AS SHE STARES, NOT WANTING TO BELIEVE HER EYES, AT THE DAMNING EVIDENCE!
PHOTOS OF OLD FLAMES!
OH!... OH NO...
NEVER, IN ALL THEIR YEARS TOGETHER, HAS FRED BROUGHT THEM OUT BEFORE-- WHAT COULD CAUSE HIM TO DO SO NOW?
THEY STARE MOCKINGLY AT HER, FRED'S OLD FLAMES, TRYSTS, AND DATES. AND BIANCA'S MIND SLIPS DEEPER INTO DEPRESSION...
FORGET HIM, DEARIE-- HE'S WITH ME, NOW!
AND HE'LL BE WITH ME, NEXT! YOU KNOW FREDDY LIKES VARIETY-- IT'S SURPRISING HE'S STAYED WITH YOU THIS LONG!

WITH A SUDDEN JEALOUS AND ANGRY SWEEP OF HER ARM, BIANCA SHOVES THE SMUG FACES FROM HER SIGHT--BUT THEY REFUSE TO LEAVE HER MIND SO EASILY!
COULD--COULD FRED REALLY BE TIRED OF ME?
OH, FRED--WE'RE MORE THAN LOVERS--WE'RE A TEAM! CAN YOU HAVE FORGOTTEN THAT?
WAIT ONE DAMN MINUTE! WHAT AM I DOING? SULKING? AN X-THIEF DOESN'T SULK--SHE ACTS!
35/8HS SHE NEVER HANGS HER CLOTHES!
IF ANY OF THOSE BIMBOS THINK I'M GOING TO GIVE UP MY MAN--OR, IN FRED'S CASE, MY S'BWAT--WITHOUT A FIGHT, THEN THEY DON'T KNOW BIANCA ARDEN!

CLEAVAGE--CHECK! SKIN TIGHT PANTS--CHECK! ALL WEAPON SYSTEMS FUNCTIONING!
MY NEXT TACTICAL MOVE IS TO TAKE THESE ARMS--AND LEGS, AND OTHER "EQUIPMENT"--TO THE COMBAT FRONT!
SORRY I HAVEN'T DRIVEN YOU LATELY, BABY--BUT SINCE FRED MOVED IN... WELL, LET'S JUST SAY THE FREDMOBILE HAS ITS ADVANTAGES!
BUT YOU'LL ALWAYS HOLD A SPECIAL PLACE IN MY HEART!
AFTER ALL, MOM STOLE YOU FOR MY COLLEGE GRADUATION PRESENT!

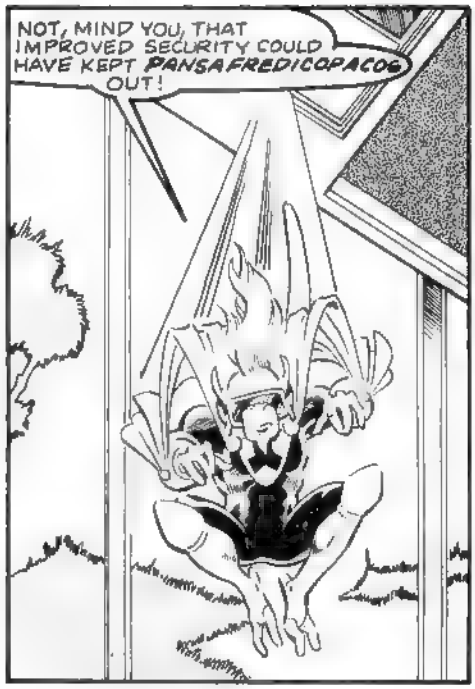
SOON BIANCA HAS LEFT THE ASTEROID BELT BEHIND AND LANDED ON HIDE OUT, THE NEARBY ANARCHIC PLANET...
JOE'S BAR-- WE USED TO COME HERE ALL THE TIME... IT'S AS GOOD A PLACE TO START AS ANY!
ALIEN BITE
WELCOME TO JOE'S-- THAT'LL BE TWO CRED-- BIANCA! HI!
HI, CARLTON-- NEW JOB?
$ 2 COVER
YEP-- BUZZ GAVE ME A GOOD RECOMMENDATION SO HERE I AM!
AND STILL A DOORMAN, TOO. WELL, I SUPPOSE IT'S GOOD TO STICK WITH A TRADE YOU KNOW!
YOU HAVEN'T SEEN FRED HERE, HAVE YOU? I WAS SUPPOSED TO, UM, MEET HIM HERE TONIGHT.
HAVEN'T SEEN HIM-- BUT I JUST CAME ON A FEW MINUTES AGO! GOOD LUCK FINDING HIM IN THIS CROWD!
THANKS -- LOOKS LIKE I'LL NEED IT!
BARDA WAS PEEVED, BUT I NEEDED A BREWSKI! 'SIDES, I FIGURE ONE NIGHT WON'T MAKE MUCH DIFFERENCE TO MIRACLE!

HERE'S ONE-- HOW MANY POPES DOES IT TAKE TO CHANGE A LIGHT BULB?
I GOT TIRED OF LOOKING AT THE DARKS OF THINGS AND DROPPED IT ALL! YEAH, I FIND MUCH MORE SATISFACTION IN ADVERTISING!
WHAT A MESS! I'LL NEVER FIND--
SO THEN THE KHAN SAYS, "YOU'RE SO STUPID YOU COULD BE ONE OF MY WIVES!"
WAIT! THAT LOOKS LIKE FRED'S HAIRDO!
HAS ANYONE TOLD YOU YOUR SCALES LOOK PARTICULARLY SLIMY TONIGHT?
OH, I BET YOU SAY THAT TO ALL THE GIRLS! HEE, HEE!
SO, MY DEAR, MY STALL OR YOURS?
WHEW--IT'S AN ALIEN OF A DIFFERENT COLOR! MAYBE HE'S NOT IN A BAR, AFTER ALL!
BUT IF HE'S NOT, THEN WHERE IS HE?

HOW'S THAT, HONEY?
BIANCA WHO?
HEE, HEE!
MMM, YES! BIANCA WAS NEVER THIS GOOD!
UNBIDDEN, BIANCA'S MIND OFFERS UP ANSWERS TO HER QUESTION!
BIANCA
WHAT A PLEASURE IT IS TO BE WITH A GIRL WHO'S THE RIGHT HEIGHT!
HO, HO, HO! I LOVE IT!
STOP IT, BIANCA! MAYBE FRED'S JUST OUT ON BUSINESS OR SOMETHING!
BUT IF THAT'S TRUE, WHY DIDN'T HE TAKE ME ALONG? OR AT LEAST TELL ME THAT HE WAS GOING?
TWO MORE, BARKEEP-- AND MAKE HASTE!
SAY-- I RECOGNIZE THAT VOICE--AND THE ARMS! BUT THE DICTION?
ALL RIGHT, FOLKS, I'M GOING TO DO SOME IMPRESSIONS NOW! SEE IF YOU CAN GUESS WHO THIS IS--"I AM NOT A CROOK!"
RIGHT! GARY BRODSKI!
WELL, WELL-- OFFICER PINBACK! FANCY MEETING YOU HERE! OFF DUTY, I PRESUME?
PERMANENTLY. INTERPOL HAS TERMINATED MY EMPLOYMENT WITH THEM.
DID YOU GET THE VOCABULARY AS A GOING AWAY PRESENT?
HA, HA, I CAN'T USE MY COP DIALECT IF I'M NOT A COP!

DID YOU COME HERE JUST TO TORMENT ME?
NO, I'M LOOKING FOR FRED. SEEN HIM?
NOPE... WHAT'S THE MATTER--YOU TWO HAVING PROBLEMS?
NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS!
SO YOU ARE HAVING PROBLEMS!
HEY, NOW THAT THE SQUIRT'S GONE, HOW ABOUT YOU AND ME--
HA HA HA! YOU AND ?GASP? ME?! OH--HA HA--THAT'S ?GASP? RICH!
HA HA HA!
HEH HEH!
HO HO HO!
HEE HEE HEE!
HA HA HA!
THEY--THEY'RE ALL LAUGHING AT ME! AND I DON'T HAVE MY GUNS!
HEE HEE HO!
TEDDY--THE BRAINS BEHIND PINBACK'S BRAUN
"DATE PINBACK? HA!" SCOFFS EVERY FEMALE IN THE GALAXY!
PINBACK STILL LIVES WITH HIS MOM!
BWAH-HA HA!
HA HA
OH, THE EMBARRASMENT! I CAN NEVER SHOW MY FACE IN PUBLIC AGAIN!
ARE YOU A CLOSET PINBACK? OUR SELF TEST CAN TELL YOU BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE!

AND WHAT OF THE OBJECT OF BIANCA'S SEARCH? HE CAN BE FOUND ACROSS TOWN--ALONE.
SEEMS ODD PULLING A JOB WITHOUT BIANCA. NOT THAT I'LL NEED HER--
--THE ALARMS HERE ARE A JOKE! ON A PLANET LIKE HIDE OUT YOU'D THINK A JEWELER WOULD BE A TAD MORE SECURITY CONSCIOUS!
THE DIAMOND DISTRIBUTOR


NOT, MIND YOU, THAT IMPROVED SECURITY COULD HAVE KEPT PANSAFREDICOPACOG OUT!

SURE HOPE I CAN FINISH THIS JOB AND GET BACK BEFORE BIANCA FINDS OUT I'M GONE!
SHE'D BE UPSET IF SHE KNEW I WAS STEALING WITHOUT HER! BUT A S'BWATS GOT TO DO WHAT A S'BWATS GOT TO DO!

UGH! WHERE DID THAT STENCH COME FROM?
=BELCH=
BEHIND FRED, DEATH--IN ITS MOST DISGUSTING FORM--HAS APPEARED!

I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE, BUT I HAD MY FILL OF BELCHING LAST ISSUE! IF YOU CAN WAIT A FEW MINUTES I'LL BE GONE AND--
WHACK
YOU BE GONE ALL RIGHT--
--DEAD AND GONE! CAUSE POX THE MUTANT BE AFTER YOU!

GREAT, JUST WHAT THE COMIC-BOOK INDUSTRY NEEDS-- ANOTHER STINKING MUTANT!
HEY, IT AIN'T MY FAULT I GOT BIT BY AN IRRADIATED HUMAN!
A WHAT--? NO, NEVER MIND I DON'T EVEN WANT TO KNOW!

LOOK, POX, WE RUN A *TIGHT* *BOOK* HERE AND THERE'S NO ROOM FOR ANY SELF-PROCLAIMED MUTANTS. TELL YOU WHAT-- OUR *PUBLISHER* USED TO BE A BIGWIG AT *MARVEL*, MAYBE HE CAN PUT IN A *GOOD WORD* FOR--

I AIN'T *TRYING* TO GET INTO YER BOOK--I'M *ALREADY* HERE!

HERE TO *KILL* YOU!

OOF!

YOU CAN'T BE *SERIOUS!*

NO, I ALREADY *TOLD* YOU--I'M *POX!*

I MEAN, ABOUT >GAK< *KILLING* ME! I DON'T >CHOKE< EVEN KNOW YOU!

SO *WHAT?* I KILL LOTSA PEOPLE I DON'T KNOW -- IT'S MY *JOB!*

SO YOU'RE A PAID *ASSASSIN.*

I SHOULD HAVE GUESSED FROM YOUR *STENCH*--THE STENCH OF *VERMIN.*

YOU THIEVES IS ALWAYS ACTIN' SO *SUPERIOR*--I'M GONNA *LIKE* KILLING YOU AND YER PARTNER!

OUCH!

KILL *BIANCA*--? *NO!* WHA-- MY *GOGGLES!*

THAT'S JUST THE FIRST THING I'M GONNA *BREAK!*

WITHOUT MY GOGGLES I'M BLIND, HELPLESS! I CAN'T BE-- I HAVE TO STOP POX AND PROTECT BIANCA!
BUT HOW? I CAN'T FIGHT WHAT I CAN'T SEE!
YOU CAN'T BEAT ME, THIEF! GIVE UP!
AN X-THIEF NEVER GIVES UP!
DON'T MATTER, YOU GONNA BE DEAD SOON EITHER WAY!
PHEW! HEARD HIM COMING-- THAT TIME! BUT WILL HE ALWAYS MAKE THAT MUCH NOISE?
GO AHEAD, RUN! RUN LIKE THE SCARED LITTLE THIEF YOU IS! I GOT LOTSA TIME TO CATCH YOU!
HE'S CLOSE BY-- I CAN SMELL HIM! BUT HE'S TOO QUIET! WHERE--
OUCH!
YOU SHOULDA KEPT RUNNING, SUCKER!
YER NO FUN-- YOU FELL RIGHT OVER!
WAC
COURSE, IT DON'T MATTER WHAT YOU DO-- THE END'S STILL GONNA BE THE SAME!

GOT TO GET AWAY FROM POX, REGROUP, SO TO SPEAK! AND I'VE GOT TO BRING MY OTHER SENSES INTO PLAY-- PARTICULARLY MY SENSE OF SMELL!
ALL THIS RUNNING IS MAKING ME HUNGRY!
MAYBE I'LL EAT YOU FOR A SNACK AFTER I KILL YOU!
COME ON-- YER JUST A THIEF, YOU AIN'T GONNA WIN!
JUST A THIEF? JUST A THIEF! IT'S TIME TO TEACH YOU A THING OR TWO ABOUT THIEVES, POX!
HE'S ALMOST UNDER ME! I MAY NOT GET ANOTHER CHANCE--
-- SO FOR BIANCA'S SAKE THIS HAD BETTER WORK!
HUH--?
YIPE! HE'S QUICKER THAN I THOUGHT!
NOT BAD-- FOR A THIEF!
GOT TO GET CLOSE TO HIM, NULLIFY HIS WEAPONS!
OKAY, POX-- LET'S FINISH THIS HERE AND NOW!

YOU READY TO MEET YER MAKER NOW?
I'VE ALREADY MET ALL THREE OF THEM!
AND THEY OBVIOUSLY BELIEVE I CAN DEFEAT YOU--
--OR YOU WOULDN'T BE HERE!
AND YOU KNOW, I'D REALLY HATE TO LET THEM-- AND BIANCA-- DOWN!
KRAK
ARGH!

SO LET'S PUT AN END TO THIS, SHALL WE?
BASH!
UHHH...
NOW, WHY DID I BREAK INTO THIS JEWELRY STORE?
OH YES...

SECONDS LATER, POX WINKS AWAY, BACK TO HIS EMPLOYER. FRED HARDLY NOTICES POX'S DEPARTURE, THOUGH...
BLIP
OKAY, I KNOW THAT RING'S AROUND HERE SOMEWHERE! JUST HAVE TO GET MY BEARINGS...
FRED, I SAW THE FREDMOBILE ON THE ROOF AND-- WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR FACE?!
HANG ON JUST A SEC, BIANCA-- I'M LOOKING FOR SOMETHING IMPORTANT!
YOU'RE PULLING A JOB WITHOUT ME? OH, FRED-- WHY?
WELL, IF I'D INVITED YOU ALONG THEN IT WOULDVE RUINED THE SURPRISE!
BIANCA, WILL YOU MARRY ME?
UM, FRED I'M OVER HERE!
OH, RIGHT. LET ME TRY AGAIN-- WILL YOU MARRY ME?
OF COURSE!
HEH, HEH-- THOUGHT SO!
NEXT THE X-CHANGE

"X-THIEVES" X-TRA!

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

(CONTINUED FROM INSIDE FRONT COVER)

Again, let me emphasize that I do not feel that any system currently in place (especially Canada's system!) is flawless or perfect! Far from it! However, I feel that in any truly just society, the emphasis must be placed on consensus and societal solutions rather upon the every-man-for-himself noninvolvement principle that would be the ultimate result of the system that you seem to be advocating.

I hope that my words have been of some interest to you — and have at least coherently indicated my position on this matter. I also hope that they are received in the spirit that they are offered — namely, one of friendly debate.

"T.M. Maple"
Box 1272, Station B
Weston, ONT M9L 2R9

PS: Since you sent a copy of your letter to Henry Vogel, I guess I should send him a copy of this. (Boy, won't *he* be thrilled?!)

Dear "T.M.,"

Actually, I received your letter a little more than a week after it was dated — apparently you beat the postal strike. We shall see how well this letter fares. And I think the "rotten postal service" of both our countries would be greatly improved if private companies were allowed to compete in delivering first class mail.

On my use of the term "government extortion" in place of the common euphemism of "taxation": My unabridged Webster Dictionary defines "extortion" as the "Act or process of extorting: a process of exacting money &c., by force, threats or other illegal means; act of demanding an exorbitant price for an article offered for sale; overcharge; rapacity." (Emphasis mine.) Under the listing for the root word "extort" the same lexicon explains the phrase "extort from" means "to wring, twist out of (a person), exact, obtain from, force out of, by physical compulsion, threats, fraud or other means, legal or illegal. . . ."

Connotations are slippery things. Obviously my use of "extortion" in this context does not imply "overcharge." I use this term to emphasize the coercive aspect of government action, with the issue of legality or illegality being irrelevant. I was once a newspaper reporter, and in that capacity sometimes covered both civil and criminal trials. My general impression from those experiences is that the legal system is a game set up to enrich lawyers, and substitutes symbol manipulation for fisticuffs in the resolution of disputes. Any relation between legality and morality is merely coincidental.

On the other hand, I must object to your assertion that "any proper construction of 'majority rule' entails the concept of 'minority rights.'" On the abstract level, these are distinct, separate concepts which are usually combined into a system which used to be called "liberalism" when our language was more precise and is these days normally called "democracy." Different democratic systems have different admixtures of these tenets. Some other systems, most notably Marxist systems, have democratic elections, thus "majority rule," but no significant provision for "minority rights."

On the practical level, "majority rule" is in fact rule by a coalition of minorities; because acceptance of the state's legitimacy by far more than a simple majority is needed for government to work, and because the balance of power among minority groups shifts over time, the minorities in power grant certain privileges for the minorities out of power. These *privileges* are distinct from *rights* in that privileges are something granted by the government subject to various conditions, whereas rights are a moral claim by a person against others, which may be said to be bestowed by the Creator or, in secular terms, based in essential human nature. Rights as such may or may not be recognized by the state, but they never originate with the state as do privileges.

Moving from the general to the particular, I assert that a person has a *right* to the fruits of his labor and investment, based on his nature as a reasoning creature which must labor, save and invest in order to sustain his life and improve his material condition. A person may be justly deprived of his property only in the process of redressing some aggression he may have committed against another person, i.e., if he steals your car and wrecks it, you have the right to see his bank account liquidated or his paychecks garnished in order to pay for the loss.

So far as I am aware, no government on Earth consistently recognizes the human right to property. Democratic governments generally recognize the *privilege* of people to keep a portion of their earnings, subject to the government's desire for funds, and other conditions. In U.S. congressional discussions of the tax code, any provision which allows a taxpayer to keep more of his money is regarded as a "tax expenditure" by the government. The idea here is that the government is really the rightful owner of all wealth in the country and that citizens are allowed to keep some of it because this serves the national interest.

In your arguments you hold that the government's taking of wealth from people against their will, so long as it observes all of its own laws while doing so, is legitimate because it is, after all, the government. This is circular logic. You suggest that extortion by a majoritarian government is justifiable because the alternative (I presume, extortion by a non-majoritarian government) is worse. This is beside the point. So far, you have failed to establish a moral justification for taxation. Your attempt to establish a pragmatic basis, with the example of the need for traffic laws, also does not address the point. (A person who does not heed traffic laws, by his direct action, places the lives and property of others in jeopardy, and is therefore an aggressor. A citizen who refuses to pay his taxes is not aggressing against anyone directly.) Neither does your example of playing a radio in your apartment so loudly as to disturb your neighbor. (You are aggressing against your neighbor with the sound waves, a physical phenomenon; if your apartment were completely sound-proofed there would be no aggression and therefore no conflict of interests. As somebody else whose name escapes me now has put it, "Your right to swing your fist stops at the end of my nose.")

I have heard it said that "just governments derive their power from the consent of the governed," which is a way of describing the social contract theory of moral government. (This theory is actually flawed, in that "consent" which cannot be removed by the governed is not really consent at all, but I won't get into that here.) But even so, this does not establish a moral base for taxation. We have a right to self-defense, and may transfer that right to the state. We have a right to settle our disputes peacefully and may transfer the power of mediation to the state. We have the right to establish charitable agencies to provide for the impoverished of body and spirit, and may transfer that service to the state. But we have no right to steal from one another which may be transfered to anyone. This is the point of my little exercise in the first letter, about Smith and his gang robbing Jones. The leap in logic here is not my comparison of Smith's gang with a government, it's your assertion that a government has the right to do something Smith's gang cannot!

We have grown up in a world where governments systematically rob people and call it "taxation," and most of us accept this as proper because we've never known anything different. This is the awesome power of tradition on human thinking. But some among us, particularly writers of science fiction and fantasy, have little use for tradition and demand a justification for everything.

You did come close to stating the best *practical* justification for taxation at one point, but you got lost in the "majority rule" cloud. That point is, without taxation how would the necessary services of government be funded?

I think you and I agree that "necessary" services include defense against aggression by foreign governments (national defense), defense against aggression by domestic individuals and groups (justice system), and not much else besides. At this point I'm not sure whether a civil adjudication system is really necessary in the sense that it's necessary that the government, and not some private agency, undertake this responsibility. Private adjudication and mediation has a lot of advantages, but may not work unless it's backed up by a government power.

Where I'm sure we disagree is regarding aid to the needy. You didn't say much about cultural arts programs but I think Henry made as good a case as I could about that. But you may be surprised to know that I do agree in principle that social cooperation is far superior to every-man-for-himself as a guiding ethic. I merely insist that cooperation be voluntary; when it's imposed by above through government then it becomes tyranny rather than consensus. It tends to undermine creativity, achievement, and charitable impulses (money for the poor? I gave at the tax office).

I'll have to wait till next time to make my case for charity as opposed to government welfare, as I'm out of time now. But I'm enjoying this exercise and I hope you are, as well. And I plan to keep sending copies to Henry until he asks me to stop.

Looking forward to your reply.

Scott Bieser
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